

Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

Survey No.

M: 21-166

Magi No.

DOE ___ ye



1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic The Wood Lot

and/or common Gaithersburg Wye

2. Location

street & number South side of B&O Railroad Tracks,
between South Summit Avenue and Frederick Avenue ___ not for publication

city, town Gaithersburg ___ vicinity of congressional district 9

state Maryland

county Montgomery

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<input type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Chessie System Railroads, Richard C. Sibley, Real Estate Development Department

street & number 100 N. Charles St. telephone no.: (301) 237-3972

city, town Baltimore state and zip code Maryland 21201

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Montgomery County Records liber EBP31

street & number 50 Courthouse Square folio 435

city, town Rockville state Maryland

6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title N/A

date ___ federal ___ state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records

city, town

state

7. Description

Survey No. M:21-166

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date of move _____

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

DESCRIPTION

The Gaithersburg Wye is situated on 2.25 acres adjacent to the Metropolitan Branch of the old Baltimore & Ohio Railroad (now Chessie System) tracks between South Summit and Frederick Avenues in the City of Gaithersburg, Maryland.

In order to serve as a terminating point for trains out of Washington, it was necessary that a means be provided for "turning" (reversing the direction) of the steam locomotives at Gaithersburg. This could be accomplished most economically by means of a "wye," an arrangement of trackage which, when viewed from above, looks like the letter "Y" attached perpendicularly to the mainline track (or to a siding parallel to the main track). The two "legs" of the "wye" are actually back-to-back concave arcs. The degree of curvature of these arcs must be low enough to accommodate the wheelbase of the longest locomotive to be turned on the wye.

At the apex of the "triangle" of tracks thus formed, i.e., where the two "legs" of the "wye" come together, a "tail track" (the base of the letter "Y") is provided which is long enough to accommodate the longest locomotive to be "turned."

In operation, the locomotive enters one leg of the wye from the mainline and proceeds to the end of the tail track. The track switch at the tail-track end of the wye is then aligned for the other leg of the wye. The locomotive then reverses its direction and proceeds from the tail track back to the mainline over this second leg of the wye. Upon its arrival back on the mainline track it is facing in the opposite direction from its direction upon entering the wye!

The wye, as originally constructed, connected directly to the eastbound mainline track. In later years a siding parallel to the mainline was constructed on the south side of the eastbound track, and the wye was connected to this siding. The east end of this siding is connected to the eastbound mainline track west of the Summit Street grade crossing. This configuration is still in existence today. The west end of this siding now constitutes another "tail track" since it ends a short distance west of the wye switch. (The west end of the siding may at one time have been connected to the eastbound mainline track in the vicinity of the present Frederick Avenue overpass.)

As it exists today, the west leg of the wye has numerous small trees and bushes growing up through it. The east leg of the wye and the tail track are in rather poor condition. The siding is still in use. All three switches are still in place. The east leg of the wye is still needed for the railroad to serve a commercial siding which connects only to the wye, by means of a fourth switch.

8. Significance

Survey No. M: 21-166

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates

Builder/Architect

check: Applicable Criteria: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D
and/or

Applicable Exception: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Level of Significance: ☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Gaithersburg Wye dates back to 1888, a time when Gaithersburg was experiencing a period of substantial growth and modernization inspired by the opening of the Metropolitan Branch of the B&O Railroad. The "wye" was of major importance to the town because before the wye was constructed, Gaithersburg could only be served by through trains. Once the wye was available, trains could originate and terminate at Gaithersburg and the town became part of the Washington-based commuter circle. Census records reflect rapid growth in the area during this timeframe. The wye was built during a period of substantial improvement including the double tracking of the line, the introduction of block signals and major technological advances in rail operation. In many ways, the wye is better evidence of the ambitions and success of the new system and the benefits derived from it by the land it served than the handsome stations that stand along the way.

HISTORY AND SUPPORT

The Metropolitan Railroad was envisioned before 1850 to link Washington, D.C. with the B&O west. Plans faltered on route disputes and then were interrupted by the Civil War. The Confederate assault on Maryland and close approach to Washington dramatized the vulnerable position of a national government dependent on a single rail access for supplies, mail, and troops. After the war, the D.C. City Council, the U.S. Congress and Maryland General Assembly supported the new direct line west. Work was commenced in 1867 and completed in 1873.

The Metropolitan Branch of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was completed in Gaithersburg and opened for service on May 25, 1873. Local travel and agricultural shipments burgeoned all along the line. In 1874, the Gaithersburg station handled 800 tons of fertilizer. By 1884, 100,000 bushels of grain were shipped. The local economic and community growth created by the line resulted in vastly increased demand for local agricultural and passenger commuter services. These services, plus the already scheduled services to the west soon exceeded the capabilities of the single tracked line.

Double tracking from Washington to Gaithersburg commenced in 1886 and was completed in 1893. On July 5, 1888, land was purchased from the Fulks-DeSillum family and the turning wye was constructed, whereupon Gaithersburg became the terminus for local service to and from Washington. The wye made it possible to "turn" the locomotives and cars at Gaithersburg, thus further enhancing both freight and passenger service capabilities of the line. In 1891,

(See Attachment 8.1)

(Attachment 8.1)

John T. DeSillum stated that, "More wheat is now annually delivered here than was formerly grown in the whole County." By 1894, eight of the 18 passenger runs on the B&O Metropolitan Branch were locals between Washington and Gaithersburg.

Gaithersburg had been chosen as the terminus for local service for several reasons, the most important of which were as follows:

First, a direct line west intersecting the Metropolitan at Gaithersburg (the Gaithersburg-Laurel, or Gaithersburg-Hanover line), had been planned since the 1850s but was dropped in the economic recession of the 1870s. Later, in 1881, a "Baltimore, Cincinnati and Western" railroad through Laurel to Gaithersburg was proposed. Neither came to fruition, but the possibility of such a future line may have influenced the selection of Gaithersburg as outer limits of local service.

Second, Gaithersburg was the hub of a network of market roads extending into the adjacent farm area. The large brick station and freight shed were built in 1884, evidence of its importance. Many stations remained within small frame sheds or platforms for passengers. Local development was greatly enhanced by the construction of the wye. The B&O sustained transportation access during the crucial period before automobiles became reliable means of travel and hauling.

Third, the Metropolitan Branch stimulated "suburbanization" and numerous summer resorts in the area between Washington and Gaithersburg, thus creating great demand for local passenger service.

With the advent of the turning wye, passenger locomotives, and indeed complete (short) passenger trains could be "turned" at Gaithersburg. Upon arrival of a passenger "local" from Washington, the train would stop to unload on the westbound track (or siding) at the passenger station. The train's locomotive would most likely be uncoupled from the train, move to the eastbound track and then to the wye to be "turned" and "serviced" for its return trip to Washington. If the cars of the train were to return to Washington without being turned, they might be left in front of the station for the Washington-bound passengers to board while the locomotive was being turned and serviced.

On the other hand, if the train from Washington was short enough to fit on the tail track of the wye, the locomotive might remain with the train while it unloaded in front of the station, and then the whole train would move to the wye to be "turned." The train would then, at the proper time, move to the eastbound mainline in front of the station to load passengers for the run to Washington.

The "local" passenger runs were undoubtedly primarily "inbound" in the morning and "outbound" in the evening, a pattern which exists to this day, even though Gaithersburg is no longer the "terminal" for this operation.

In 1916, the local terminal was extended to Washington Junction (Point of Rocks), and later to Brunswick. The wye's importance then transferred to eastbound freight operations.

(See Attachment 8.2)

(Attachment 8.2)

Gaithersburg is located at the crest of a series of rather long and steep grades (by railroad standards) from the west. As the tonnage of eastbound trains increased, the railroad began using helper locomotives on the rear of these trains to provide a "push" up these grades. These "pusher" (helper) locomotives would uncouple from the rear of the eastbound trains at Gaithersburg, their mission having been accomplished. The helper locomotives then needed to return westward to their base in Brunswick, Maryland. Thus the Gaithersburg wye was ideally located for its second major mission—to turn "helper" steam locomotives originating west of Gaithersburg.

A heavy, eastbound coal drag being assisted up the Barnesville and Gaithersburg "hills" by a "pusher" locomotive would gradually increase in speed as it crested the hill at Gaithersburg. As the caboose of the coal drag neared Summit Avenue in Gaithersburg, the rear-end brakeman would uncouple the pusher engine from the caboose "on the fly," and the pusher locomotive would slow to a stop just east of the Gaithersburg station. The pusher crew would then move their locomotive westward onto the south siding and proceed to the Gaithersburg Wye. There they would turn the engine; either by backing to the tail track via the east leg of the Wye and returning to the south siding via the west leg, or, by heading into the tail track via the west leg and backing out the east leg. Upon completing the "turn" they would return to the Gaithersburg Station. The crew would then contact the division dispatcher and request orders for a crossover and return move to Brunswick. With the proper orders issued, the crew would remove the padlocks from the crossover switches just west of Summit Avenue, wait the required time for the switches to unlock, throw the switches, cross over to the westbound track, realign and lock the crossover switches, and proceed back to Brunswick to await their next assignment.

The Wye was used heavily during the latter part of the steam era for turning eastbound helpers. As the years passed and steam locomotives gave way to diesel electric locomotives which would operate equally well in either direction, the Gaithersburg Wye was no longer needed to turn locomotives. The east leg of the Wye and the tail track continued to serve as an unloading track for a local lumber yard, but the west leg of the Wye was no longer used. Today, the lumber yard has moved to make way for a new highway interchange, but the east leg and tail track are still needed to serve the Southern States Cooperative commercial siding, which is connected only to the east leg of the wye.

Gaithersburg is no longer the "end of the line" for the railroad, but interestingly, has assumed a similar position in the eyes of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's Metrorail system. Today Gaithersburg is a transportation market and employment hub with a network of feeder roads being constructed to serve the area much as originally intended in 1850, but with somewhat different technology.

In recognition of the Wye's significant contribution to the community's heritage and progress, the City now seeks to preserve this site as a historical remnant of the promise 130 years ago of a modern transportation system destined to serve the burgeoning population of Gaithersburg and Montgomery County.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. M:21-166

Montgomery County Land, Records. Herbert Harwood, The Impossible Challenge. Gaithersburg
The Heart of Montgomery County, "Gaithersburg and the Railroad", "Government".
Correspondence with Wm. Hutchinson, Herbert Hardwood and Gerald Hott

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 2.25 acres

Quadrangle name _____

Quadrangle scale _____

UTM References do NOT complete UTM references

A

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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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E

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F

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G

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Located at the southern side of the old B&O Railroad tracks between South Summit Avenue, South Frederick Avenue, and bounded by Cedar Avenue.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Judy Christensen, Architectural Description Gerald Hott, Co-author
Historic Preservation Potomac Chapter, National Railway
organization City of Gaithersburg Advisory Committee date June 1986 Historic Society
street & number 31 South Summit Avenue telephone 948-3220
city or town Gaithersburg state Maryland 20877

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

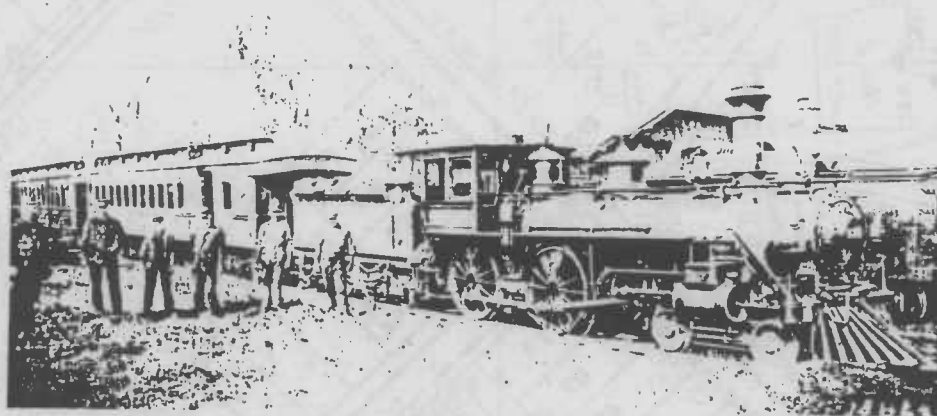
return to: Maryland Historical Trust
Shaw House
21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 269-2438

WASHINGTON FINALLY GETS WEST: THE METROPOLITAN BRANCH

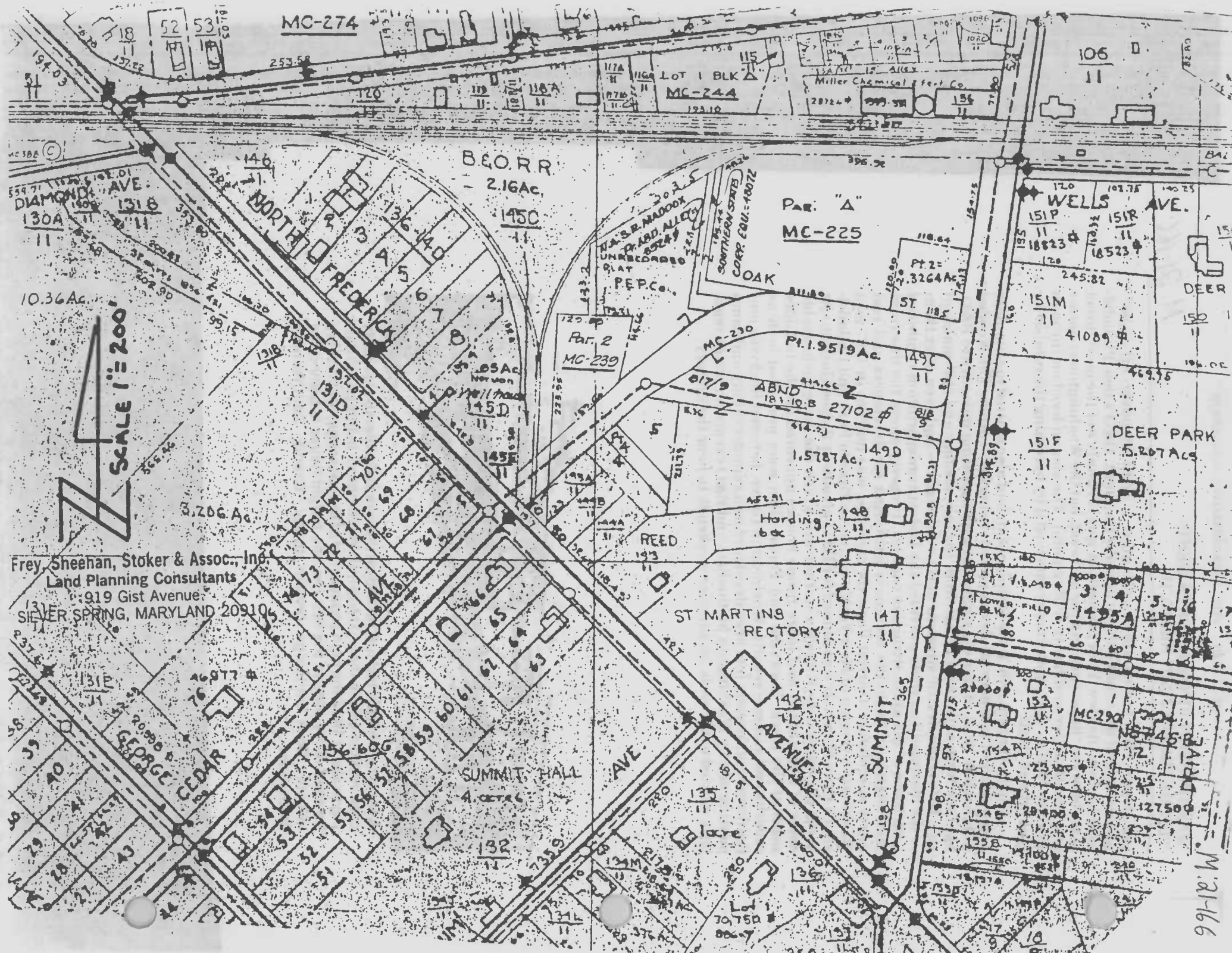
M:21-166

the slogan "All Trains via Washington. . .With Stopover Privilege", woven around the Capitol dome to make the point. B&O's new Philadelphia line and its New York connection was certainly not the most direct route between those cities and the midwest, but the Washington stopover was an attractive and hardy selling point. The slogan lived on through the late 1930's; the Capitol dome survived it by becoming the symbol for the railroad itself.

And by the late 1880's the Metropolitan had also started to stimulate a new kind of commercial development: suburbanization. The wooded hills outside Washington may have been an operating nuisance to B&O, but they were a pleasant refuge from the low, steamy and still-malarial city. Before the electric streetcar and paved roads — and even after them — the Metropolitan route provided the fastest transportation combined with some of the most attractive country. Property along the line from Washington to Rockville became a hot target for developers and real estate speculators. Garrett Park, for example, was laid out in 1887 as a Washington version of New York's exclusive Tuxedo Park and Philadelphia's Bryn Mawr. (It was named for B&O president Robert Garrett.) At about the same time Knowles station was given the more fashionable name of Kensington and large frame houses appeared on the hillsides south of the track. Rockville and Forest Glen were promoted both as suburbs and summer resorts. Washington Grove, between Rockville and Gaithersburg, already had been developed as a summer colony and camp meeting site by Washington Methodists and B&O excursion trains regularly carried out crowds on summer weekends to hear the oratory.



A Met branch local has just turned on the wye at Gaithersburg and its crew relaxes before the next trip into Washington. In this photo dating to about 1889, the high peaked roof of the passenger station may be seen dimly behind the first car; the freight house is behind the engine. Both buildings remain today. Credit: Smithsonian Institution.



MC-274

MC-244

Par. "A"
MC-225

Par. 2
MC-239

MC-230
Pl. 1.9519 Ac.

1.5787 Ac.

ST MARTIN'S
RECTORY

DEER PARK
5.207 Ac.

Frey, Sheehan, Stoker & Assoc., Inc.
Land Planning Consultants
919 Gist Avenue
SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND 20910

SCALE 1" = 200'

M. 21-166

Note: the sites shown on this map either do not have MHT #s or were inventoried after those placed on the other maps.

Summers House
 309 N. Frederick Ave.
 M-21-169
 Beall House
 307 N. Frederick Ave.
 M-21-167
 Fraley House
 303 N. Frederick Ave.
 M-21-155
 Reed House
 301 N. Frederick Ave.
 M-21-154

Thomas & Company Cannery
14 Chestnut Street
M-21-168

Gaithersburg B&O Railroad Station
5 S. Summit Ave.
M-21-151

Bowman Mill
317 E. Diamond Ave.
M-21-153

The Ascension Episcopal Chapel
200 S. Summit Ave.
M-21-136

B&O Wye Site
S. Side of B&O Tracks
M-21-166

Summit Hall Farm
502 S. Frederick Ave.
M-21-3

NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS

Conveyors

Washington Grove

M:21-166

308

12'30"

310

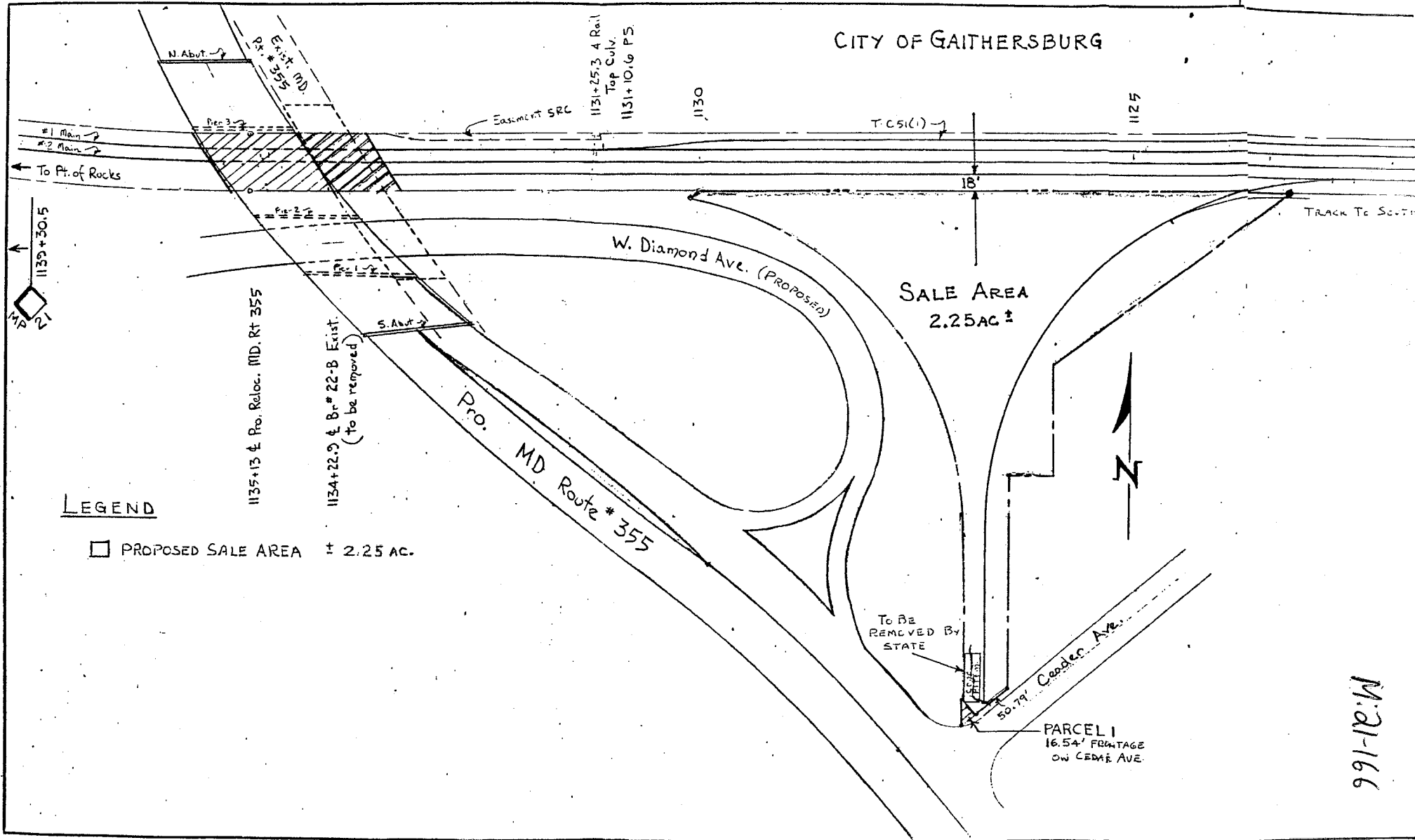
(ROCKVILLE)
FEB 11 1944

10.

313

DEERWOOD / 2 MI

CITY OF GAITHERSBURG



M.2-166